

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A computer implemented method for enabling perception of multiple online personas in an instant messaging communications session, the method comprising:

5 identifying at least two identities within a communications environment to whom messages may be directed; and

enabling a first persona of a user to be projected to a first of the identities while concurrently enabling a second persona of the same user to be projected to a second of the identities.

10 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising associating the first persona with a first group of identities so that the first persona is projected to members of the first group of identities in a communications session, wherein the first of the identities is included within the first group of identities.

15 3. The method of claim 2 further comprising associating the second persona with a second group of identities so that the second persona is projected to members of the second group of identities in a communications session, wherein the second of the identities is included within the second group of identities.

20 4. The method of claim 1 further comprising associating a persona with the first of the identities and associating a different persona with a group of the identities with which the first of the identities is associated, wherein the first persona projected to the first of the identities comprises an amalgamation of the persona associated with the first of the identities and the different persona associated with the group of the identities.

25 5. The method of claim 4 wherein the persona associated with the first of the identities overrides the different persona associated with the group of the identities to the extent a conflict exists.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising associating a global persona with each of the identities and associating a different persona with a group of the identities with which the first of the identities is associated, wherein the first persona projected to the first of the identities comprises an amalgamation of the global persona associated with each of the identities and the different persona associated with the group of the identities.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the global persona associated with each of the identities is overridden by the different persona associated with the group of the identities to the extent a conflict exists.

8. The method of claim 1 further comprising associating a global persona with each of the identities and associating a different persona with the first of the identities, wherein the first persona projected to the first of the identities comprises an amalgamation of the global persona associated with each of the identities and the different persona associated with the first of the identities.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein the global persona associated with each of the identities is overridden by the different persona associated with the first of the identities to the extent a conflict exists.

10. The method of claim 1 further comprising associating an individual persona with the first of the identities, associating a group persona with a group of the identities with which the first of the identities is associated, and associating a global persona with each of the identities, wherein the first persona projected to the first of the identities comprises an amalgamation of the individual persona associated with the first of the identities, the group persona associated with the group of the identities, and the global persona associated with each of the identities.

11. The method of claim 10 wherein the individual persona associated with the first of the identities overrides the group persona associated with the group of the identities and

the group persona associated with the group of the identities overrides the global persona associated with each of the identities, to the extent a conflict exists.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein the communications session comprises an instant
5 messaging communications session.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein the identities are members of a buddy list, the buddy list including the online presence state of the identities.

10 14. The method of claim 1 further comprising projecting the first persona of the user to the first of the identities while concurrently projecting the second persona of the same user to the second of the identities.

15 15. The method of claim 14, further comprising selecting among the first and second personas for projection to a particular one of the identities based on an attribute of the particular identity.

16. The method of claim 1 further comprising receiving from the user a selection of at least the first and second personas.

20 17. The method of claim 1 further comprising selecting the first persona based upon an attribute of the first identity.

25 18. The method of claim 1 further comprising configuring the persona assigned to the first identity to change based upon the occurrence of a predetermined event.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein the predetermined event is based upon a time of day.

30 20. The method of claim 18 wherein the predetermined event is based upon a day of the week.

21. The method of claim 18 wherein the predetermined event is based the passage of a pre-determined interval of time.

5 22. The method of claim 18 wherein the predetermined event comprises a weather condition at a predetermined geographic location.

23. The method of claim 18 wherein the pre-determined event comprises communication of a predetermined word.

10

24. The method of claim 18 wherein the predetermined event comprises communication of a predetermined emoticon.

15 25. The method of claim 18 wherein the predetermined event comprises communication of a predetermined date.

26. The method of claim 18 wherein the predetermined event comprises communication of a predetermined number of instant messages from the first identity.

20 27. The method of claim 1 wherein the persona assigned to the first identity is configured to change at random among more than one selected personas.

25 28. The method of claim 1 wherein the user comprises a potential instant messaging sender, the first identity comprises a first potential instant messaging recipient, and the first persona is rendered to the first potential instant messaging recipient before communications are initiated by the potential instant messaging sender.

30 29. The method of claim 1 wherein the user comprises a potential instant messaging sender, the first identity comprises a first potential instant messaging recipient, and the first persona is rendered to the first potential instant messaging recipient after communications are initiated by the potential instant messaging sender.

30. A computer implemented method for enabling perception of multiple online personas in an instant messaging communications session, the method comprising:

rendering, on an instant messaging recipient system, an instant messaging application user interface for an instant messaging communications session involving at least one potential instant messaging recipient and a single potential instant messaging sender;

receiving a message that includes a text message and a persona to be displayed by the potential instant messaging recipient when perceiving the text message, the persona being selected by the instant messaging sender system from among multiple pre-defined personas for the single potential instant messaging sender, each persona comprising a collection of one or more self-expression items; and

rendering the selected persona at the potential instant messaging recipient system when rendering another portion of the message.

31. The method of claim 30 wherein the selected persona is rendered before communications are initiated by the potential instant messaging sender.

32. The method of claim 30 wherein the selected persona is rendered after communications are initiated by the potential instant messaging sender.

33. The method of claim 30 in which self-expression items comprise one or more of a buddy icon, a wallpaper, an emoticon, and a sound.

34. The method of claim 30 further comprising defining one or more personas.

35. The method of claim 34 further comprising:

assigning a first persona to a first potential instant messaging recipient so that the first persona is thereafter automatically invoked and projected, in an instant messaging communications session involving the first potential instant messaging recipient; and

assigning a second persona to a second potential instant messaging recipient so that the second persona is thereafter automatically invoked and projected, in an instant messaging

communications session involving the second potential instant messaging recipient, wherein the second persona is at least partially distinguishable from the first persona.

36. The method of claim 34 further comprising:

5 assigning a first persona to a first group of potential instant messaging recipients so that the first persona is thereafter automatically invoked and projected in an instant messaging communications session involving a member of the first group of potential instant messaging recipients; and

10 assigning a second persona to a second potential instant messaging recipient so that the second persona is thereafter automatically invoked and projected, in an instant messaging communications session involving the second potential instant messaging recipient, wherein the second persona is at least partially distinguishable from the first persona.

37. The method of claim 30 wherein a persona is selected for use in an instant messaging communications session with a potential instant messaging recipient according to a hierarchy of selection.

38. The method of claim 37 wherein selecting the persona according to a hierarchy of selection comprises first selecting a persona assigned to the potential instant messaging recipient if available; next selecting a persona assigned to a group containing the potential instant messaging recipient, if available; and next selecting a default persona, if available.

39. The method of claim 37 wherein selecting the persona according to a hierarchy of selection comprises appending one or more self-expression items of a higher-ranked persona to self-expression items of a lower-ranked persona.

40. The method of claim 37 wherein selecting the persona according to a hierarchy of selection comprises replacing one or more self-expression items of a lower-ranked persona with self-expression items of a higher-ranked persona.

41. The method of claim 30 further comprising locking a personality to a potential instant messaging recipient so as to guard against unintended personality switching.

42. The method of claim 30 further comprising forbidding a personality to be assigned to a potential instant messaging recipient so as to guard against unintended personality switching.

43. The method of claim 30 further comprising changing the personality assigned a potential instant messaging recipient while conversing with the potential instant messaging recipient in an instant messaging communications session.

44. The method of claim 30 further comprising receiving a persona associated with the potential instant messaging recipient and saving the received persona.

45. The method of claim 30 wherein the persona is provided by a third party.

46. The method of claim 30 wherein the persona assigned to the potential instant messaging recipient is configured to change upon the occurrence of a predetermined event.

47. The method of claim 46 wherein the predetermined event comprises the passage of a pre-determined interval of time.

48. The method of claim 46 wherein the predetermined event comprises the passage of a pre-determined time of day.

49. The method of claim 46 wherein the predetermined event comprises a weather condition at a predetermined geographic location.

50. The method of claim 46 wherein the pre-determined event comprises a day of the week.

51. The method of claim 46 wherein the predetermined event comprises communication of a predetermined word.

52. The method of claim 46 wherein the predetermined event comprises communication of a predetermined emoticon.

53. The method of claim 46 wherein the predetermined event comprises communication of a predetermined date.

54. The method of claim 46 wherein the predetermined event comprises communication of a predetermined number of instant messages from the potential instant messaging recipient.

55. The method of claim 30 wherein the persona assigned to the potential instant messaging recipient is configured to change at random among more than one selected personas.

56. A computer implemented method for enabling perception of multiple personas in a communications session, the method comprising:

rendering, on a communications recipient system, a communications application user interface for a communications session involving at least one potential communications recipient and a single potential communications sender;

receiving a message that includes a text message and a persona to be displayed by the potential communications recipient when perceiving the text message, the persona being selected by the communications sender system from among multiple pre-defined personas for the single potential communications sender, each persona comprising a collection of one or more self-expression items; and

rendering the selected persona at the potential communications recipient system when rendering another portion of the message.